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A
S E R M O N,

Preached in a Parish Church in NORFOLK,

By a F R I E N D,

On February 27, 1778,

Being the Day appointed for a GENERAL FAST,

A N D

Written by a L A D Y.

THE SECOND EDITION.

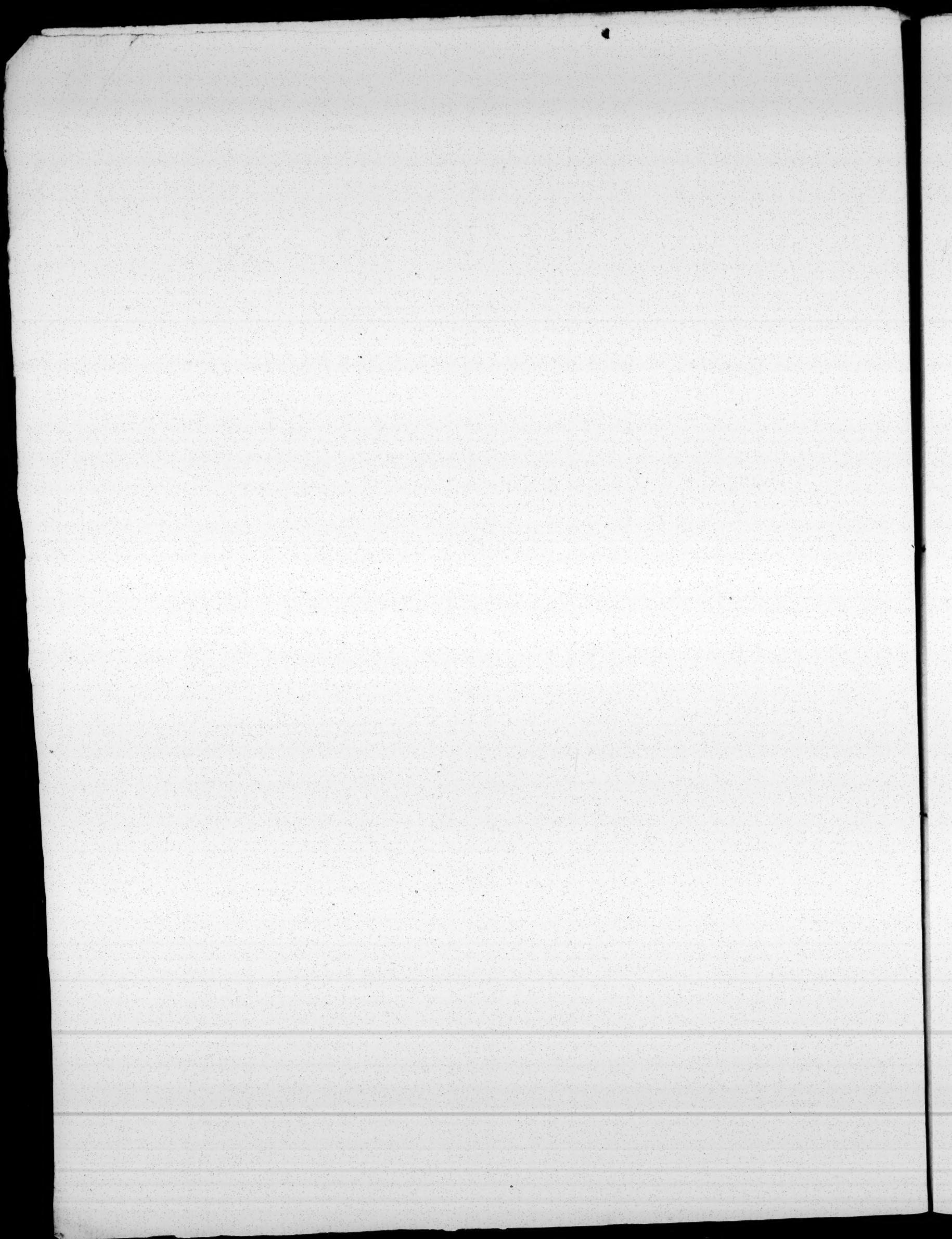


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Advertisement to the Reader.

ASERMON by a Lady will be thought a performance so unprecedented and so much out of her province, that it may be necessary to acquaint the Reader, what gave occasion to her employing her pen in this way. It was this; in conversation with a friend on the depravity of the times, he told her, that if she would make a sermon on the subject, he would preach it. She accordingly took up her pen, writing nothing but the dictates of her own heart, without being indebted to any Author, either living or dead; far from thinking at the time that it would ever be heard of again, but that as soon as it was preached, the flames would conceal its defects.

Should it be asked, how it came to be made publick amidst so many Sermons on the occasion most certainly far superior to this, the truth must be owned. It was suggested to her, that if she would print off 500 or 1000 at her own expence, and give them to the benevolent Society for the Discharge and Relief of PERSONS imprisoned for SMALL DEBTS in the gaols of Norwich and Norfolk, a pretty sum
might

might be raised for the purpose. And she flatters herself, that none among her own sex at least, either in Norwich or in Norfolk, but would be tempted to give a shilling, if not for the novelty of the performance, yet surely for the promoting so charitable a design.



JEREMIAH V. 9.

Shall I not visit for these things, saith the LORD? and shall not my soul be avenged of such a nation as this?

THE Prophet throughout this chapter is lamenting the grievous offences, wherewith the nation of the Jews had long been provoking the wrath of the Almighty. He bewails their astonishing idolatry in departing from the living God who had chosen the Hill of Sion for his residence, and serving strange Gods in the land. He lays before them their horrid adulteries, their deceit and treachery to each other; and then introduces Jehovah appealing to their hearts, whether such heinous sins did not cry aloud for vengeance. Shall I not visit for these things, saith the LORD? and shall not my soul be avenged of such a nation as this?

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How

How awful, how alarming such an appeal! Strange that any people could hear it, without feeling its force and poignancy! as it must certainly convey to them this admonition, that though the Almighty be slow to wrath and slower to punish, though he will often prove a sinful people by all the gentle methods of mercy and compassion, before he will try them in the furnace of affliction; yet, if they will go on to commit sin with greediness, and despise his patience and forbearance, he will certainly take vengeance on such a nation as this.

My design in the following discourse is to apply these words to ourselves. But I think your own hearts must have made the application: They must have told you, that the words of the text may with equal propriety be applied to this sinful land wherein we dwell. 'Tis true, we do not worship idols; but are we not lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God? Are there not too many amongst us who trample upon all his laws, despise his reproofs, profane his sabbaths, and make a jest of every thing that is serious and sacred? Nay, and as if we strove
to

to excel in wickedness, we see many who perhaps are more vile on the Lord's Day, than on any of the other six, spending it in drunkenness, riot, and debauchery. It should seem as if we were resolved to defy his power, and say, Is there knowledge in the Most High? Then surely we must deceive ourselves, if without a speedy repentance we can hope to escape the vengeance of the Almighty, any more than did the Jews of old, and every other nation under Heaven, when they filled up the measure of their iniquities.

But are not the sins of this nation attended with higher aggravations than those of the Jews? Most certainly. They, as long as they continued in obedience to the laws of their Creator, were promised deliverance from all their enemies, and every other temporal blessing their hearts could wish. But not the least mention is made of everlasting felicity; and it is pretty certain, that the bulk of the people had no notion of a future state of rewards and punishments till after the Babylonish captivity. We, on the other hand, have the bright light of the Gospel

shining among us, and may be as sure of rising again, either to everlasting happiness or to everlasting misery, as we are sure that we shall die. The Jews had the prospect of an earthly Canaan, but we of an heavenly. Peace, plenty, and length of days on earth, was all they were taught to hope for, as the reward of their obedience. Then how much are our hopes and expectations higher than theirs? And if they were not spared, will it not be presumption in us to hope to escape?

I may add that we, as they were, have long seemed to be the favourites of Heaven. How often hath the Lord of Hosts been our defence and shield in the day of battle. He hath stretched forth his almighty arm to save us, and made the very elements contribute to our victory, when a violent hailstorm, blown in the face of our enemies, hath brought us off conquerors. And what has been the consequence? Have our hearts been warmed with gratitude, so as to render him more dutiful obedience? Alas! by no means.

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Our extensive commerce hath brought us an increase of wealth: And to what purpose? I fear to no other, but to make us, like the stubborn Jews, forget the Lord our Maker, and the many wonderful deliverances he hath wrought for us. For have we not imported with their merchandize into this once happy land the vices of every nation, to the destruction of our religion and morals: infomuch that among the men of opulent fortunes and all the worldly wise, religion is scarce ever thought of, unless it be for the purposes of ridicule and contempt? But such, I hope, are none of you that hear me this day; for to such, it is to be supposed, all preaching would be vain, unless we were to take a view of them upon their death-beds; then perhaps they would willingly attend to the word of exhortation, and in the anguish and perturbation of their minds would gladly give up all their possessions, to be in the condition of the truly religious man, though cloathed in rags. But let us draw a veil over such a dismal scene; and let us pray, that the Almighty would touch their hearts, that he would give them the grace of repentance to consider their ways, and the terrible effects
that

that their evil example must have upon all around them.

Vice, it is said, generally begins at the head, and descends with amazing rapidity from the court to the cottage, which we know was the case with us in a former reign. We are now so happy as to have a Monarch upon the throne eminent for piety and conjugal affection. Might we not then suppose, that all within the influence of the court would put on the robe of righteousness, and wear it as the only garb of recommendation: But it is too notorious that the very reverse of this is the case. And I am sorry to say it, that even amongst the Ministers of the Gospel, those who ought to watch for our souls, and, like good shepherds, gently lead the flock out of the reach of the ravening wolf, that ranges about to devour, will be found some, who by their own evil example point them the road to destruction. If, in the language of scripture, these be not dumb dogs, they bark in vain.

Oh

Oh that every one of us would lay these things to heart before it be too late! The destroying Angel seems ready to strike, let us disarm him by a speedy repentance! and, without finding fault, either with those that promoted or those that were averse to this unhappy war, let us suppose that we see the hand of God in it, and tremble, lest it should be designed by him, as a severe but just scourge for our evil deeds!

Let us then approach the God of Armies, humbling ourselves before him in fasting and prayer. Every one of us must see the necessity of this, at a time when we are involved in an expensive war with his Majesty's rebellious subjects in America, dreading a visit from our natural enemies the French, and above all when many, and, I am afraid, too many of us live in open rebellion against the Majesty of Heaven.

We are met together in this sacred place to implore a blessing upon our fleets and armies, to beg mercy and pardon for our sins that have provoked the great God of Heaven to anger, and to make resolutions

solutions of better obedience, that we may avert the
 impending ruin that seems to threaten this nation.
 But do we come here with hearts truly penitent for
 our past sins, and with firm resolution to root out
 every vice, and transplant there their opposite virtues?
 Doth the sabbath-breaker resolve never more to do
 his ordinary business on that day, but to spend it in
 meditation and prayer, or in works of mercy and
 charity? Might not that Almighty Being, who gives
 us all our time, have appropriated a much larger part
 to himself? But he in tender compassion to our
 many wants and infirmities, has only commanded us
 the observation of one day in seven. Doth the
 drunkard from henceforth resolve to lead a life of
 temperance and sobriety? Doth the common-swearer
 resolve never more to use the sacred name of God,
 but with reverence and devotion? And this, I must
 observe, is a sin so much in use among you, that your
 very children will lispen an oath. Tell the common-
 swearer what a heinous crime he is guilty of, and in
 excuse for himself he will say, I have got such a ha-
 bit of it, that I cannot help it. And must not this
 be the case with your children, who, before they
 come

come to man's estate, must have got the same habit that you complain of? And with what face can you correct them for a sin, you yourself are guilty of every day, nay, perhaps every hour? If, I say, you have such sorrow and such resolutions, as I have been describing, and your hearts go along with your prayers, then may you hope that the Almighty will lend a merciful ear, that he will again be gracious to this land, and pity his people. But, if you bring no resolutions of amendment, if you offer not your hearts with your prayers, then hear what the great God of Heaven saith by the mouth of his Prophet. "The prayer of the wicked is an abomination unto me."

And well it may be: for if any of you should have a servant that has been guilty of some heinous crime, and he tells you, that he is sorry, and will never do the like again, compassion would incline you to pardon him. But should he be so base, as immediately to go and commit the same crime, how would your indignation rise against him? In this way are we daily provoking the Almighty, when we pretend to be sorry for our sins and mean nothing by

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it,

it, nay, perhaps, not even think what we are saying, but have our thoughts at that very time filled with vanity and folly. What is this but to play the hypocrite with our Maker? Thus, indeed, we may deceive each other, but cannot deceive him, who made and sees our hearts, and calls upon us to offer them to him in sincerity and devotion. "My son, says he, "give me thy heart!" which, if we will not give him, what have we to expect but that he will appoint us our portion with the hypocrites, unless we turn away his wrath by a timely repentance.

Hear with what tender compassion the Lord Jehovah entreats you to repent and amend your ways! "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die? As I live, saith the LORD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his ways and live." But if ye will not hear him, when he so tenderly calls upon you, then what have we to hope for, but that he will visit for these things, and that his soul will be avenged of such a nation as this.

God

God forbid that this should be the case! and that it may not, let me entreat you, my brethren, to put off no longer the work of repentance. It is of all others the most necessary: but it is a work we cannot perform of ourselves. We must turn to the Lord with all our hearts, beseeching him to send us help from above. And if we sincerely wish and desire to draw nigh to God, he will certainly draw nigh to us. Then let us not delay another hour. This moment we are sure of, the next is uncertain. It may, for ought you know, be the last time that I shall ever warn you to repent. I stand upon the verge of the grave, and when I shall drop in, is known only to him, who knoweth all things before they be. To-day we live, but who dares say, I shall live to-morrow?

If I have been so happy as to make any impression upon your minds, let me entreat you, as you love your own souls, not to go away and lose it, either amidst the cares or the pleasures of the world; but nourish, cherish, and improve it by prayer and meditation, by a constant attendance upon the publick

worship of God, and receiving the Holy Sacrament. These are the means you must use, to obtain the grace of repentance.

Nothing is more astonishing to me, than to see so many of you turn your backs upon the Lord's Table. I know there be some among you that say, I don't think myself good enough to come. And indeed, if you love your sins, better than you love your Saviour, you are utterly unfit to partake of the Lord's Supper. But then neither are you fit to say your prayers, nor can you pray with sincerity; your prayers are a mere mockery. When once you have conquered your evil habits, which you must do, before you can hope that your prayers will reach Heaven; then may you be enabled to pray with fervent zeal and true devotion; then may you partake of the Lord's Supper with truly penitent hearts, calling to mind his bitter sufferings for your sakes with gratitude and love.

Give me leave to put a question to you. Should any of you have a near and dear friend, just going to take his last leave of you and the world; should he

he beg it, as the only favour he can ever ask of you, that you would do some little kind offices to his family he leaves behind him, would you not think that man very inhuman, who could refuse his dying friend such a request as this? And can you refuse to obey the last command of your blessed Saviour, who died but for your sakes, when he only bids you eat bread and drink wine, in remembrance of what he has done and suffered for you? He shed the last drop of his blood to save your precious souls; and do you not think them worth your own care? Surely, you must feel yourselves full of shame and confusion at such black ingratitude.

How often have I invited you to meet me at the Lord's Table, and, God knows, hitherto without any effect. You have always turned a deaf ear to the invitation. I shall soon have occasion to call upon you again. Let me then entreat you for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the sake of your own souls, that you would not let it be again in vain*.

And

* N. B. This Sermon was preached in a Church where this part of Divine Worship was neglected.

And now, happy are you, if ye hear the word of God, and lead your lives according to it! which that you may do, shall be my earnest prayer to the Giver of all grace, through Jesus Christ.

F I N I S.

